



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



March 20, 2012

Public Health Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Room 3000
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and other members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Elaine Zimmerman, I am the executive director of the Connecticut Commission on Children, and I am writing to express the Commission's **support for HB 5541, An Act Concerning Services Provided by Dental Professionals and Certification for Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners.**

RB 5541 meets four critical points for Connecticut public policy in 2012:

1. It will increase employment.
2. It will increase access to care for the underserved.
3. It will promotes prevention.
4. It will pose little to no cost while saving dollars in dental emergencies from lack of care or access.

By expanding the definition of what dental hygiene practitioners can do, job opportunity will increase. Concurrent with this more, low-income families will be seen. Preventative care will increase for children in under-served areas. This is a no-cost or low-cost bill with significant return on investment.

Oral health is a significant component of physical and social well-being. Untreated dental conditions lead to pain, interference with eating, overuse of emergency room services, poor self-esteem and lost time at school and work. Many oral diseases can be attributed to bacterial infections that, when left untreated can affect other systems of the body. Associations between poor oral health and cardiovascular disease as well as respiratory disease have been documented. According to *Every Smile Counts*, a 2007 report by the

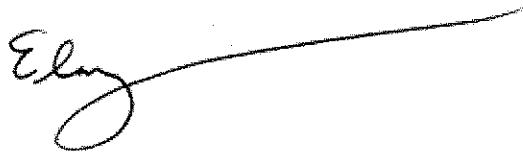
Department of Public Health, dental decay is a significant public health problem for Connecticut's children. Many children in Connecticut simply do not get the dental care they need. More than 60 percent of the state's children do not have dental sealants, an accepted clinical intervention to prevent tooth decay in molar teeth. There are significant oral health disparities in Connecticut with minority and low-income children having the highest level of dental disease and the lowest level of dental sealants.

One of the key strategies outlined in Every Smile Counts is to increase the number of dental providers in under-served areas. The report found that because of a continuing drop in the numbers of dentists in Connecticut and increases in fees, access to dental care was likely to become more difficult – for the entire population, but particularly for the working poor, ethnic and racial minorities, the elderly, and children.

We believe the bill before you will help with address this problem.

Thank you for your review, and feel free to contact us if you need further data.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elaine", followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that extends to the right.

Elaine Zimmerman
Executive Director
Connecticut Commission on Children